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ABSTRACT

The position of nanny as a career option for child care/child development/early childhood education graduates is examined. This study surveyed nannies randomly selected from the 1991 International Nanny Association Directory to determine why nannies leave their employing families. Surveys were mailed to 160 nannies; 62 (39%) nannies responded. Respondents worked an average work week of 48.7 hours with an average salary of $202 per week. Respondents reported receiving many benefits, but not all received paid vacation and health insurance. The primary reasons respondents gave for leaving their family of employment were: expiration of the contract (34 percent); differences with the family (21 percent); desire to continue education (15 percent); homesickness (13 percent); lack of commitment to the family (10 percent); and lack of friends (7 percent). (Contains nine references.) (MM)

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Why Nannies Leave Their Employing Families

By
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The position of a nanny in this country is viewed in a variety of ways. On one hand there is the caring, nurturing child care worker (nanny) and at the other extreme are the occasional negative stories about nannies. Despite the positive and negative image, little research has been conducted about any aspect of working as a nanny. Bowers (1989) also suggests there is little information about nannies and the nanny industry. One of the first extensive nanny bibliographies (Olsen & Williams, 1991) grew out of the lack of available resources to teach about nannies and this work has only recently been published.

The position of nanny is one of several career options available for individuals desiring to work with young children. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 1984-85, 5.9% of all preschoolers were taken care of by nannies (Child Care Information Exchange, 1987). While it is difficult to identify the number of nannies in the country, a U.S. Department of Commerce (1987) study discloses some possible numbers. The department's study determined that 570,000 children under the age of four (6.2%) were cared for in their own home by a nonrelative. An extremely high percentage of these children could be cared for by nannies. This figure, however, does not take into account nannies that take in other children. For example, John and Jane Smith live across the street from a family that employs a live-in nanny. They have contracted with the other family and the nanny to employ the live-in nanny and bring their daughter to be with the nanny.

The demand for nannies continues to increase. This growth pattern is due, in a large part, to the continued increase in the number of women entering and remaining in the workforce (Department of Labor, 1987). Zewig (1989) states that for every nanny, there are at least five applicant families. While there is a shortage of nannies for employing families, there is also a fairly high turnover rate. Dempsey (1991) found that two of the major difficulties families face are locating and keeping well-qualified nannies. This also raises the question about "well-qualified nannies" and how does one determine if the nanny meets that term. Currently no national or state standards that determine

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what qualifies one to be a nanny. Dempsey goes on to say, "There is no standardized nanny certificate program in the United States. Without a qualitative standard, anyone can try her/his hand at being a nanny" (1991, p. 14). The International Nanny Association (INA), however, does have a recommended code of conduct for nannies and also recommended competencies for the education of nannies (1991).

While it is important to look at the number of families and nannies in the labor market, it may also be helpful to see what the economics of the nanny industry are. Dempsey (1991) estimates that the 570,000 children having a nanny as their child care provider represents a $3.4 billion dollar industry.

The Study

My interest in nannies was as a career option for child care/child development/early childhood education graduates. If this was to be a career option, I needed to know why people left their nanny jobs. If they were leaving to work in a day care center, teach in public or private schools, or continue their education, then this may not really be a career option, but a temporary, alternative employment pattern. This study focused on why nannies left their employing families and did not include au pairs or mother helpers.

I initially surveyed former nannies I knew to determine the reasons they were no longer working as a nanny. From their comments, I developed a survey instrument which was reviewed by former nannies, early childhood educators, and nanny placement directors not used in the study.

Nannies selected for the study came from nanny placement agencies around the country that were randomly selected from the 1991 INA (International Nanny Association) Directory. Twenty agencies were asked to participate and sixteen agreed to be involved in the project. The directors of the placement agencies agreed to name up to twenty former nannies that had left their employing families within the past twelve months. The former nannies were contacted by telephone for a telephone interview or were mailed their survey. There were one-hundred sixty surveys were mailed to nannies and sixty-two were returned (39%).

Demographics

The majority of nannies surveyed were 18-20 years old when the found their first family of employment. The range in age was from 17-56; ninety-five percent of the respondents were female and five percent were male. The education level of the nannies varied from a high school degree (40%) to a Bachelor's degree (8%). The remainder of the participants had an associate degree, child care diploma, child development associate degree or specialized nanny training. However, 35% of those with training or education beyond high school had as their major child development, early childhood education, nanny child care, or elementary education.

Placement

Approximately 70% of the participants in the study located their family by going through a placement agency, while 20% located their family through a friend. The remainder found employment by placing an ad or answering an ad in the newspaper.

Living arrangements varied, but 68% of the respondents lived with their employing families, while 20% lived outside of the home. Another 12% lived at the home during the week, but were out of the home on weekends.

Respondents were asked their reasons for becoming a nanny. The major (65%) reason given was, they liked children. Other reasons given were new geographical location (10%), new experience (10%) and money (6.5%).

The respondents remained with their employing family an average of 12 months. The range, however, was from one month to 4 years.

Working Conditions

The number of children the nannies cared for ranged from one to six, but 77.5% of the nannies were responsible for one or two children. However, 56.5% of the individuals reported they cared for children of other families, not just their employing family.

The respondents cared for children whose ages ranged from 3 weeks

to 16 years. However, 66.7% of the nannies cared for children that were only 5 years old or younger.

The majority of nannies worked over forty hours a week. The following chart shows the hourly breakdown and the percentage of nannies working those hours:

less than 30 hours	6.4%
31-40 hours	14.5%
41-50 hours	25.8%
51-60 hours	29.0%
Over 60 hours	24.3%
AVERAGE	48.7 hours

While the hours may or may not appear high, 56.5% of the respondents reported they were paid extra for the evening and weekend hours they worked.

The respondents received a variety of benefits. Below is a list of the benefits and the percentage of nannies receiving them:

BENEFIT	% RECEIVING THESE BENEFITS
Paid Vacation	65.0%
Vacation with Family	44.0%
Health Insurance	34.0%
Paid Flight Home	27.0%
Life Insurance	21.0%
Use of Car	18.0%
College Classes	18.0%
Dental Insurance	7.0%

Salary

The average wage was $202 per week. However, 16% earned $101- 150 a week, and another 28% earned $151-200 a week, but 44% earned $201-300 a week. There were 12% of the nannies that earned between $301-500 a week.

Reasons for Leaving

The primary reasons nannies gave for leaving were:

Contract ended	34%
Differences with Family	21%
To Continue their Education	15%
Homesick	13%
Lack of Commitment to Family	10%
Lack of Friends	7%

Differences with family can be broken down into three major reasons. These were: 1) parenting styles; 2) personal life style of parents; and 3) Discipline.

However, despite the nannies having left their employing families, the majority viewed their experience as a positive one. On a scale of 1-10, with 10 being the most positive, 54.7% of the respondents rated the experience either and 8, 9, or 10 while only 12.9% rated the experience a 4 or less

Conclusions

The information received in the surveys should not be viewed as negative. The fact these 62 nannies left their employing families is not necessarily a negative finding. We know that nannies leave their employing families for a variety of reasons. However, in this survey, the majority of these nannies were very positive about their experience as a nanny.

The results of this survey only reinforce the fact that more research is needed about nannies. We need to determine if the work as a nanny is really being considered as a career option for people interested in working in the broad area of early childhood education. Individuals in the nanny industry (placement agencies, nannies, and parents) need to help differentiate the au pair, mother's helper and the baby sitter from the nanny. These same individuals need to help identify the role education and/or experience play in placing individuals as a nanny. For example, does an individual count as a nanny if they have child care experience, but no educational training in early childhood

education or nanny child care? Perhaps there needs to be a classification: Nanny 1 = child care experience, but not post high school education; Nanny 2 = Child care experience and a child care or early childhood diploma or Associate degree; Nanny 3 = Child care experience as a nanny and a child care or early childhood diploma or Associate degree; and Nanny 4 = Child care experience as a nanny and a Bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education. I realize there are many other configurations, but something is needed to be helpful to future nannies, placement agencies and prospective parents.

The demand for nannies is apparently not going to decrease, yet we know very little about this population. Dempsey (1991) has estimated nanny child care is a $3.4 billion dollar industry. This large outlay represents child care for many children in this country, yet little is known about placement, qualifications and who these nannies really are. Many families have found it cheaper to employ a nanny than have their children in a group day care center. Nannies may be cheaper for families with infants and toddlers or infants and preschoolers: non-economic benefits may accrue as well, i.e., low teacher-child ratio, security of one's own home, and care when the child is sick. The majority of respondents in this survey also took care of children from other families. One may need to look at the use, benefits and occurrences of nanny sharing among families.

My research only focused on those nannies that left their employing families and that limits conclusions, unless a more representative sample of employed nannies was surveyed. The conclusions are further limited because nanny placement agencies were the ones that supplied the names of the nanny. Despite asking for a random sample from them, there is no way of knowing if there was an selective screening of the designated nannies.

Nannies worked an average work week of 48.7 hours with an average salary of $202 per week, but 29% of the nannies worked 51-60 hours a week and another 24.3% were working over 60 hours a week. While 56.5% of those individuals, working extra weekends and evenings, reported they did receive extra pay for working those additional hours, one does not know if those extra hours beyond 50 a week resulted in job burnout or were one of the non-reported reasons for the nanny leaving their employing family.

Nannies reported receiving many benefits, but not all of them received paid vacation and health insurance. While the average salary was $202 a week there were still 16% earning $101-150 a week and another 28% early $151-200 a week. Nannies, placement agencies and families will need to determine how well salaries, room and board fit into placement and retention concerns.

The major reason nannies had left their employing families was because their one year contract had ended. However, reasons for non-renewal were not explored and deserve future attention.

The next major reason nannies left their employing families was because of differences with the family. There were 21% of the nannies that listed this as a reason for leaving and another 10% said they left because they had a lack of commitment to the family. These family differences were in three areas: 1) parenting styles; 2) personal life styles; and 3) discipline. One way to alleviate these differences is to include more definite questions about discipline and parenting styles on the parent application. Hopefully, these parent questions forms are shared with the nannies by the placement agencies prior to employment and result in better matching of nannies to families.

The third major reason given for leaving their employing families was to start or continue their college education. Some of these 15% wanted to remain in the early childhood education/nanny field, while others wanted to enter a different field.

The fourth reason given for leaving was homesickness. This is a difficult concern for nannies, parents, and placement agencies. This is one area that needs to be screened as extensively as possible. Screening needs to be done by placement agencies and families in order determine if homesickness will be a potential problem.

The last major reason listed by 7% of the respondents was lack of friends. This last reason could be alleviated with the development of nanny support groups by the family or the placement agency. Nannies need to feel that they have friends in their now area and have to opportunity to do things with friends outside of work. This support group or friendship building effort results in less turnover and more nanny satisfaction. Some agencies have started placing nannies within a 100-500 mile radius of their home towns because there is less homesickness, higher retention, better support and a more long term commitment as a nanny.

The results of this survey, hopefully, are just the start of more research, both qualitative and quantitative about the nanny industry. We need more information about the number, size of industry, qualifications and to take a more proactive approach to our commitment to nannies. This proactive approach, coupled with research, will help alleviate many of the concerns parents and the media may have about employing nannies to work with children.

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Dr. Olsen has been involved in the field of nanny child care for the past six years. He has presented at INA conferences and has been a member of the INA for five years. He has taught courses in Nanny Child Care, complied a nanny bibliography with Mr. Owen Williams and continues to conduct research on nannies as a career option in the early childhood education field.